

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME

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The following strategies were adapted from 'Educating the Student with Asperger Syndrome' from *Teaching Students with Autism: A guide for educators* a document prepared by the Special Education Unit of the Government of Saskatchewan (1998), and based on the work of several recognised experts in AS and autism.

IF THE STUDENT:	SUGGESTED STRATEGIES
Has difficulties with expressive language	
Makes irrelevant comments	Use Cartoon Conversations
Interrupts others	Use Social Scripts
Talks about one or a few topics excessively	Provide explicit instructions in conversational skills
Talks over the speech of others	Provide small group speech and language instruction for conversational skills
Has difficulty sustaining a reciprocal conversation	Teach turn taking
Has difficulty beginning, maintaining, and ending conversations appropriately	Teach cues for when to reply, interrupt, listen, change the topic, or end the conversation
Speaks without giving listeners information necessary for their comprehension	Practise theory of mind exercises to improve student's ability to understand what listeners may or may not know about his topic
Seems to take 'too much time' to answer questions or respond	If student's response seems slow, pause before restating the question, commenting, or orally prompting; avoid derailing the student's train of thought.
	Teach the student 'holding' phrases, (e.g. 'Let me see,' 'I'm thinking,' 'That's interesting,' and so on).
	Pause between oral instructions and check for understanding
	Make the same point several different ways, using different words for the same thing (appositives) e.g. 'In the story, Sir Lancelot killed the dragon,' 'What happened when the knight destroyed the dragon?' 'Why did the hero slay the monster?' 'Because Sir Lancelot saved the people from the dragon, he became a hero.'



IF THE STUDENT:	SUGGESTED STRATEGIES
Has difficulties with receptive language	
<p>Complex language</p> <p>Words with multiple meanings (<i>drive, heart</i>).</p> <p>Words that sound the same but have different meanings (homonyms)</p> <p>Idioms or figures of speech</p> <p>Metaphors</p> <p>Sarcasm</p> <p>Irony</p> <p>Hyperbole</p>	<p>Limit oral questions or restrict to a number the student can handle comfortably.</p> <p>Consider providing oral material in writing as well.</p> <p>Consider allowing the student to tape-record lessons given orally so that he may review them later.</p> <p>Using books, videos, role-playing, and examples from real life, draw the student's attention to use of homonyms, idioms, figures of speech, metaphors, sarcasm, irony, and hyperbole.</p> <p>Explain and point out the signals and cues – facial expressions; body language; tone, volume, rhythm, and the cadence of speech – that indicate when someone is using sarcasm, irony or hyperbole.</p> <p>When a student correctly identifies the use of these types of expression, ask him to explain how he knows what they are 'saying'.</p>
Insists on sameness, routine; problems with transitions	
<p><i>Remember: For children with AS, sameness and routine provide much-needed structure to an often unpredictable world. Work to improve flexibility, not to extinguish, rigidity. In addition, children sometimes cling to the familiar because of a lack of ability to generalise, or to 'carry over' knowledge and experience gained in one situation or another.</i></p>	
	<p>Consider the student's resistance to change as an indication of stress.</p> <p>Wherever possible, prepare the student for potential change by explaining fully what will happen.</p> <p>Use pictures, schedules, and Social Stories to explain or illustrate an upcoming change in routine.</p> <p>Help the student to recognise when skills learned in one situation can be applied to another.</p> <p>Once the student is comfortable in the classroom, deliberately change something.</p> <p>Change detail from day to day to help him practise flexibility using a 'low-stakes' issue (ie. an object or routine he is not obsessed with).</p>

IF THE STUDENT:	SUGGESTED STRATEGIES
Insists on sameness, routine; problems with transitions (continued)	
	Count down to upcoming transitions and emphasise with visuals (clock, timer, pictures, schedule): 'We have ten minutes until we go back to class,' followed by 'We have five minutes before we leave,' then, 'Let's start getting ready to return to class,' and so on.
Demonstrates impaired social interaction	
<p>Has difficulty understanding the rules of social interaction and the so-called hidden curriculum (The rules of life we know but were never explicitly taught)</p> <p>May appear naïve, tactless, or lacking in common sense</p> <p>May not be able to distinguish good-natured, playful teasing from serious threats</p> <p>May interpret what is said literally as if unaware of social context, the speaker's tone of voice, body language, or other signals</p> <p>May apply rules rigidly, regardless of mitigating circumstances</p> <p>May have problems maintaining the correct physical distance between himself and others</p> <p>May touch inappropriately (e.g. hugging every child he sees)</p> <p>May become the target of covert teasing and bullying because typical peers are more skilled at 'hiding their tracks,' leaving only the student with AS to 'react', often with inappropriate behaviour</p> <p>May become emotionally overwhelmed by the social strain</p>	<p>Provide clear expectations and rules for behaviour.</p> <p>Explicitly teach rules of social conduct through Social Stories, modelling, and role-playing.</p> <p>Teach the student to look at other children for cues as to what to do.</p> <p>Teach the student how to start, maintain, and end play appropriately.</p> <p>Teach flexibility, cooperation, and sharing.</p> <p>Develop structured social skills groups.</p> <p>Educate peers about how to respond to the student's disability in social interaction.</p> <p>Encourage cooperative games.</p> <p>Provide supervision and support for the student at breaks, recess, lunch, and travelling to and from school.</p> <p>If necessary, provide alternate arrangements for breaks, recess, lunch, and transportation.</p> <p>Assign a high-status, sympathetic peer as a 'buddy' to assist the student through non-structured times.</p> <p>Teach relaxation techniques.</p> <p>Impose no penalties for those times the student needs a break from the classroom.</p> <p>Teach the student how to monitor his emotional responses and behaviour.</p>

IF THE STUDENT:	SUGGESTED STRATEGIES
Talks about or thinks about a restricted range of interests excessively	
<p><i>Remember: A student's behaviour concerning his or her special interests is often a source of comfort and joy, as well as a hedge against stress and an opportunity to excel or shine. Focus on 'appropriating' the special interests and channelling it toward more socially appropriate expressions rather than completely extinguishing it (which would probably prove impossible anyway).</i></p>	
	<p>Establish clear rules to limit perseverative discussions and questions (e.g. limit time, place, circumstances of the discussion).</p> <p>Provide an acceptable outlet for the interests (e.g. allow child to give a presentation or report, incorporate interests in activities and assignments).</p> <p>Use the special interests to teach other skills and information.</p> <p>Use permission to talk about the special interests as an incentive or reward.</p>
Has poor concentration	
<p><i>Note: Many students with AS also have an Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD, ADD).</i></p>	
<p>Is often off task</p> <p>Is distractible</p> <p>May be disorganised</p> <p>Has difficulty sustaining attention</p>	<p>Provide frequent teacher feedback and redirection, preferably non-verbally and/or through signals.</p> <p>Break down assignments into manageable portions.</p> <p>Allow student to work in shorter sessions with frequent breaks.</p> <p>Reduce or eliminate homework assignments.</p> <p>Seat the student at the front of the class or in the area with the least number of distractions.</p> <p>Use non-verbal cues to get attention.</p>
Has poor organisational skills	
<p><i>Note: Poor organisational skills are usually the result of several neurologically based deficits, namely in executive planning.</i></p>	
<p>Often forgets to take home materials necessary for completing homework and/or forgets to bring them back to school</p> <p>Loses or misplaces notes, books, and other necessary items</p>	<p>Provide duplicate sets of necessary books and materials for home and for school.</p> <p>If the child frequently forgets to pack his books and materials, assign an aide or classmate to ensure that it gets done; do not wait for him 'to learn'.</p>

IF THE STUDENT:	SUGGESTED STRATEGIES
Has academic difficulties (continued)	
<p>Is often strong in word recognition and decoding and may learn to read very early (hyperlexia) but have difficulty with comprehension</p> <p>May do well at mathematical computations but have difficulty with problem solving</p>	<p>Use activity-based learning.</p> <p>Use graphic organisers such as semantic maps. (Inspiration and Kidspiration software).</p> <p>Break down tasks into smaller steps.</p> <p>Provide direct instructions as well as modelling.</p> <p>Show examples of what is required.</p> <p>Use outlines to help student take notes, organise and categorise information.</p> <p>Avoid verbal overload: give student time to process what you have said, answer questions, ask questions, etc.</p> <p>Do not assume that he has understood what he has read; check for comprehension, supplement instruction, and use visual supports.</p> <p>Research and consider using interventions designed for working with non-verbal learning disability (known as NLD or NVLD).</p>
Is emotionally vulnerable	
<p>May have difficulties coping with social and emotional demands of school</p> <p>May be easily stressed</p> <p>May have low self-esteem</p> <p>May have difficulty tolerating mistakes</p> <p>May be prone to depression, anxiety</p> <p>May have rage reactions and temper outbursts</p>	<p>Provide positive, explicit, and specific praise (e.g. 'You were very smart to use coloured folders to organise your notes for the paper' is preferable to 'Good job').</p> <p>Praise the student in terms that are meaningful to him; many persons with AS respond well to being told that they are 'wise', 'clever,' 'smart,' 'creative,' and so on.</p> <p>Teach the student to recognise when he has exhausted his own problem-solving options and to ask for help.</p> <p>Teach techniques for coping with difficult situations and dealing with stress.</p> <p>Set up situations that allow the student to make choices.</p> <p>Help the student to understand his behaviours and the reactions of others.</p> <p>Educate other students.</p> <p>Use peer supports such as a buddy system and peer support network.</p>

IF THE STUDENT:	SUGGESTED STRATEGIES
Has sensitivity to sound	
<p>Types of noises that may be perceived as extremely intense may be anything, including sounds most people do not hear (such as the hum of fluorescent lights). Typically troublesome sounds include sudden, unexpected noises or high-pitched continuous noise</p> <p>May have an extreme reaction to particular sounds (e.g. a particular person's voice, the school bell in the east hallway but not in the west hall way)</p> <p>May be aversive to sounds most young children delight in: music, videos, recordings aimed at younger children; toys that 'talk' or make sounds; musical toys</p>	<p>It may be necessary to entirely avoid some sounds.</p> <p>Minimise background noise.</p> <p>Allow the use of earplugs that block volume without distorting sound if necessary.</p> <p>Teach and model relaxation strategies and diversions to reduce anxiety.</p> <p>If the student is to participate in an 'aurally challenging' situation (e.g. assembly, school concert, sports event), be sure you have provided an alternate plan and the student is aware of his ability to escape the situation at the first sign of being overwhelmed. Sometimes just having that degree of control over the situation can help him cope.</p>
Has sensory sensitivities	
<p>May have extreme or unusual responses to sound, touch, taste, smell, sight</p> <p>May have difficulties with vestibular system (which regulates balance) and proprioception (which essentially lets the student know where his body is in space)</p> <p>May demonstrate an aversion to certain activities that seems 'inexplicable' or 'extreme' but in fact has an underlying sensory cause (e.g., a refusal to go to art class may be about an aversion to the smell or texture of a material, such as clay, paper, paint, etc.)</p>	<p>Suspect sensory difficulties when the student's avoidant behaviours seem 'illogical' or 'out of proportion'; specifically ask the student if an item, activity, or environment bothers him (e.g. 'Does the feel/smell of the clay make you uncomfortable?').</p> <p>Be sure that any child who appears to have sensory difficulties is screened for them.</p> <p>Be aware that normal levels of auditory and visual input can be perceived by the student as too much or too little.</p> <p>Keep the level of stimulation within the student's ability to cope.</p>

IF THE STUDENT:	SUGGESTED STRATEGIES
Has difficulties in school-related physical activities and sports	
<p>Has poor coordination</p> <p>Lacks basic sports-related skills (catching, throwing, etc)</p> <p>Has sensory difficulties in gym or on a field</p> <p>Is highly distractible or inattentive during team play</p> <p>Has aversion to activities involving physical contact</p> <p>Has aversion to gym class and physical activity</p>	<p>Work with occupational and/or physical therapists to help the student develop skills needed for school-related physical activities.</p> <p>Become acquainted with the basic philosophy and techniques of Adapted Physical Education (APE).</p> <p>Focus on providing opportunities for individual as opposed to team activities.</p> <p>Focus on activities that have no winners or losers and that are cooperative and without 'leaders'.</p> <p>Consider developing opportunities for students with AS to exercise individually or with a partner or small group instead of in a larger group.</p>

